

## LCQ8: Management of sports facilities

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Following is a question by the Hon Ma Fung-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (October 24):

According to The Ombudsman's report (the Report) on a recent direct investigation into the booking and use of sports facilities of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), LCSD's venue booking system has loopholes which give rise to problems like touting activities and difficulties in booking facilities. On the other hand, according to LCSD's 2010-2011 Annual Report, while the usage rates of most LCSD's sports centres and courts reached almost 80%, the usage rates for some of its recreational and sports facilities, such as bowling greens (30.6%), squash courts (53.7%) and tennis courts (56.5%), were relatively low. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the number of complaints about the booking and use of venues received by LCSD in the past two years, and how these cases had been handled;

(b) given that the Report has pointed out that, in monitoring the use of venues, many staff members of LCSD have failed to follow strictly the procedure for verification of identity documents when users sign in, and confirmation from LCSD about the availability of the sessions selected by organisations often comes very late, whether the Government will, apart from improving LCSD's venue booking arrangements, put in place other measures to improve LCSD's service culture, so as to address these two issues effectively;

(c) given that the Report has pointed out that some national sports associations (NSAs) had relayed to The Ombudsman that confirmation from LCSD about the availability of their selected sessions often came very late, causing difficulties for them in organising activities, whether the Government has any plan to provide more convenience for organisations, such as NSAs, in venue booking, so as to allow more sufficient time for these organisations to plan various types of sports activities; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(d) of the measures for boosting the usage rates of those recreational and sports facilities which have relatively low usage rates; and

(e) whether it has any plan to enhance the role of District Councils in monitoring the use of LCSD's sports facilities, so as to increase the usage rates of those cultural and sports facilities which have relatively lower usage rates; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

For more than a year, LCSD has been comprehensively reviewing the booking procedures and allocation mechanisms for sports facilities with a view to making improvements. In the past year, the department has introduced the following measures to curb touting:

(1) requiring staff to follow strictly the procedure for verifying the identity documents of all hirers to prevent the transfer of the right to use the venues;

(2) requiring applicants to use only their Hong Kong Identity Cards to register as Leisure Link patrons to prevent people using different identities or false information to make multiple online applications to register to book leisure facilities in order to circumvent the quota for individual patrons; and

(3) requiring members of the public to make telephone reservations for leisure facilities at least three days in advance and confirm by payment at least one day before the day of use to minimise cases where reserved sessions are left unused when reservations have neither been confirmed by payment nor cancelled in advance.

LCSD will put in place more new measures to improve further the booking arrangements and curb abuse. Major new measures are as follows:

(1) shortening the existing 30-day advance booking period for individual users to minimise the time available for touts to transfer permits;

(2) tightening the quota of fee-charging facilities that can be booked by individual users during peak hours;

(3) reviewing "stand-by" arrangements, including cancellation of the "stand-by" arrangement for football pitches; and

(4) imposing penalties on people who fail to take up a booked session or who otherwise misuse the booking system.

As some of the improvement measures will affect the current arrangements whereby the public book leisure facilities, LCSD will consult the public and the relevant organisations, including District Councils, sports organisations and the Community Sports Committee of the Sports Commission on these measures. LCSD will also upload the consultation document and questionnaire on its website. After analysing views on these measures, LCSD will revise the procedures and arrangements for booking and allocation of facilities. Corresponding improvements to the Leisure Link System will also be carried out to facilitate the implementation of the improvement measures.

My reply to the different parts of the question is as follows:

(a) LCSD will handle complaints in accordance with its established procedures. In the past two years, LCSD has received about 220 complaints regarding the booking or use of leisure venues, about half of which related to dissatisfaction with the strict enforcement of the verification of hirers' identities by venue staff. Other complaints were mainly about excessive booking by organisations (13%) and booking arrangements for non-fee charging venues (8%). A breakdown of the complaints received is at the Annex.

(b) To prevent the unauthorised transfer of booked leisure facilities, since last year LCSD has required venue staff to enforce strictly the verification of hirer's identity documents. Hirers are required to produce the identity documents that they have used for making the booking for verification at the check-in counter before using the facilities. Random inspections have also been conducted at venues to check whether the sign-in arrangements have been strictly enforced.

There have been a few isolated cases involving the failure of venues to provide timely confirmation of the availability of the sessions selected by organisations. The main reason for this was that more than one organisation had applied for the same session, and LCSD staff took time to liaise between the organisations concerned in order to meet their needs as far as possible. In this regard, LCSD has reminded staff and officers in-charge of venues of the requirement to follow the order of priority set out in the "Booking Procedure for Use of Recreation and Sports Facilities" issued by

LCSD when handling block bookings by organisations, as well as the importance of giving timely replies. Written notification should be sent to the organisations concerned if the relevant "national sports associations" (NSAs) are not available for mediation.

In addition to reviewing and improving booking procedures for leisure facilities, LCSD also remains committed to building new sports facilities. Since 2007, we have built new facilities and improved existing facilities at a total cost of over \$9 billion. These facilities include swimming pools, sports centres and football pitches.

LCSD completed the first phase of the upgrading of the Leisure Link System in March this year. Following the system upgrade, the capacity of the system's central processing unit has significantly improved, with the number of online transactions completed during the morning peak session at 7am increasing from 360 to 560 on average, representing an increase of about 56%. The average waiting time at booking counters has been reduced from 14 minutes to 9 minutes on average. LCSD is now implementing the second phase of the upgrading, covering areas such as improving the Leisure Link database server, system network, emergency inspection and recovery, as well as upgrading computers at counters. With the completion of work in mid-2013, the network infrastructure of the system will improve. Online booking requests will be processed more quickly and reserve capacity will be made available to accommodate future expansion of the Leisure Link service.

(c) As stated in part (b) of the reply, the main reason for not giving a timely reply to applicant organisations was that more than one organisation had applied for the same session, and LCSD staff took time to liaise between the organisations concerned in order to meet their needs as far as possible.

To facilitate the work of the NSAs in promoting and organising international events, championships, leagues and training events, NSAs are allowed to make priority booking of LCSD recreational and sports facilities 12 months in advance. Their bookings are accorded a higher priority than those of other organisations. LCSD also provides venues to NSAs for training Hong Kong representative teams. Apart from the Wan Chai Swimming Pool, which is designated for exclusive use by NSAs for athlete training, each NSA can choose one leisure venue as a dedicated centre for training their Hong Kong teams to promote the development of their respective sport. The NSA concerned is eligible to make a long term priority block booking of the venue for Hong Kong team training. Sports

equipment, a conference room and storage space will be provided at the venues as far as possible to meet the needs of NSAs.

(d) Recreation and sports facilities under LCSD management, especially natural turf pitches, artificial turf pitches and the arenas of indoor sports centres generally have high usage rates. However, to improve further the utilisation of some individual facilities, LCSD will continue to encourage schools, subvented non-government organisations, NSAs and district sports associations to use selected sports facilities, such as outdoor bowling greens, activity rooms and squash courts, free of charge during non-peak hours (i.e., from opening till 5pm on weekdays between September and June the following year). Moreover, concessionary rates are available to people with disabilities, elderly people aged 60 or above and full-time students.

In addition, LCSD will make sports facilities with lower usage rates available for other uses subject to circumstances. For example, squash courts can be converted into table tennis rooms, American pool rooms, multi-purpose activity rooms and indoor archery ranges, and tennis courts with relatively low usage rates can be used for non-designated activities such as tai chi practice and fitness exercise. Members of the public may apply for the use of these facilities as long as the activities to be conducted will not affect the original design of the facilities.

LCSD will continue to explore measures to enhance the usage rates of sports facilities and work with sports organisations to promote and optimise the use of these facilities.

(e) The District Councils (DCs) play an important advisory role in district affairs. Since 2008, the DCs have taken part in the management of LCSD facilities, including sports facilities. LCSD will consult the DCs when planning the construction of leisure and sports facilities. Moreover, the department will also seek DCs' views on improvement works or the management of facilities with a view to increasing the councils' role in monitoring the management of these facilities.

Ends/Wednesday, October 24, 2012

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